

Message Text

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16

ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SAM-01 IO-10 AID-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /069 W
----- 108835

R 200750Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2703

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 0609

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, OTRA, SY, US

SUBJECT: THOMAS VAIL VISIT: DIFFICULTY OF SCHEDULING AP-
POINTMENTS WITH PRESIDENT ASAD AND OTHER SYRIAN LEADERS

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

1. THOMAS VAIL, EDITOR PUBLISHER OF CLEVELAND PLAIN
DEALER, ARRIVED DAMSCUS FEB 9 FOR TWO-DAY FACT FINDING
VISIT. HE HAD CAREFULLY PREPARED FOR THIS VISIT TWO
MONTHS IN ADVANCE BOTH BY LETTERS TO SYRIAN GOVT AND
SYRIAN EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON. THIS EMBASSY HAD GIVEN
AMPLE NOTICE OF HIS ARRIVAL AND MADE SPECIAL PITCH FOR
HIS GETTING AN APPOINTMENT WITH PRESIDENT ASAD. HOWEVER,
ONLY HIGH-LEVEL OFFICIALS HE SAW WHILE HERE WERE MININFO
AHMAD ISKANDER AHAMD AND DEPUTY FONMIN ABDUL GHANI RAFII.

2. VAIL'S EXPERIENCE ONLY LATEST REMINDER OF DIFFICULTIES
THIS EMBASSY ENCOUNTERING IN TRYING TO HELP
VISITORS EXPECTING MEETINGS WITH SYRIAN OFFICIALS,
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PARTICULARLY WITH PRESIDENT ASAD, HAVE HAD IN RECENT

MONTHS. IN CONTRAST TO SITUATION IN NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES WHERE SADAT, HUSSEIN AND ISRAELI LEADERS APPRECIATE IMPORTANCE OF MEETING PERSONALLY WITH FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS, SYRIAN HEAD OF STATE DOES NOT PLACE PARTICULARLY HIGH PRIORITY ON SUCH MEETINGS. HIS PUBLIC RELATIONS SENSE IS SIMPLY NOT WELL DEVELOPED. PERIODICALLY HE WILL GIVE ON-THE-RECORD INTERVIEWS WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF PRESTIGIOUS ESTERN JOURNALS AND OTHER NEWS MEDIA, BUT IF, IN HIS VIEW, HIS POSITION HAS NOT CHANGED NOTABLY SINCE THE LAST INTERVIEW, HE IS RELUCTANT TO CARVE OUT AN HOUR OR TWO FROM A HEAVY SCHEDULE TO GO OVER SAME GROUND.

3. DURING PAST MONTH PRESIDENT WAS ALSO UNABLE TO SEE EITHER SENATOR MATHIAS OR DAVID ROCKEFELLER, AGAIN DESPITE OUR BEST EFFORTS BOTH THROUGH OFFICIAL CHANNELS AND BEHIND SECENES. MATHIAS' CALL ON PRESIDENT FELL THROUGH WHEN PRESIDENT'S BROTHER DIED. MOURNING PERIOD ALSO BLOCKED ACCESS FOR ROCKFELLER. TIME NEWSTOUR GROUP, FOR WHOM CONTROL OFFIECER WAS MININFO PERSONALLY WAS ABLE TO SEE PRESIDENT FOR TWO HOURS, POSSIBLY INDICATING THAT MININFO'S PERSONAL INFLUENCE WITH PRESIDENT COULD BE USEFUL. AT SAME TIME UNTIL AMBASSADOR CALLED PRESIDENCY IT APPEARED PRESIDENT'S STAFF HAD NOT SET ASIDE ANY TIME FOR TIME TOUR MEETING. THIS SAME STAFF HAD SCHEDULED ASAD'S MEETING WITH SENATOR PERCY FOR 24 HOURS AFTER THE SENATOR'S PLANNED DEPARTURE.

4. AMBASSADOR PLANS CALL ON MININFO THIS WEEK TO REITERATE ADVANTAGES OF PRESIDENT'S SEEING INFLUENTIAL JOURNALISTS, AND TO SEEK CLOSER COOPERATION WITH MINISTER PERSONALLY IN CASES WHERE EMBASSY POINTS OUT PARTICULAR IMPORTANCE OF ONE VISITOR OR OTHER.

5. EMBASSY WILL CONTINUE DO ITS BEST TO ARRANGE APPROPRIATE MEETINGS BETWEEN SARG LEADERSHIP FOR VISITING PRESS AND OTHER VIPS, BUT RECOMMENDS DEPARTMENT CAUTION VISITORS EXPECTING SUCH MEETINGS, IN PARTICULAR WITH PRESIDENT ASAD, THAT THEY (A) CANNOT BE GUARANTEED AND (B) WILL NOT BE FIRMLY SCHEDULED IN ADVANCE OF VISITOR'S CONFIDENTIAL

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ARRIVIAL IN COUNTRY EVEN WHEN GRANTED IN PRINCIPLE.
MURPHY

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